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IRON CONFERENCE AT ST. PETERSBURG.

THE meetings of the Russian iron and coal trades conference at St. Petersburg have been marked, says *Engineering*, by an acrimonious discussion between the representatives of the older Ural establishments and the newer ones in the Baltic provinces and South Russia. The former date from the time of Peter the Great, when that monarch, by generous and well-directed state support, gave such an impulse to the charcoal iron trade that Russia became the leading iron-producing country in Europe. For a considerable period pig-iron was one of the principal products Russia exported to this country. In the beginning of the century, however, mineral coal began to prove a formidable competitor to charcoal in smelting-operations; and ultimately the tables were turned, and Russia received most of her iron from England, instead of supplying her with it. This revolution was marked by the collapse of the Ural iron industry, the ruin of which was accelerated by the wasteful destruction of the forests, and the extravagance of descendants of the iron-masters enriched by the support of Peter the Great. Twenty years ago the Russian government wanted to encourage the manufacture of rails, etc., for the home railways, and, finding the Ural firms disorganized and ruined, created a new industry at St. Petersburg, Briansk, etc., by giving large and lucrative contracts to a number of Russian and foreign capitalists. As coal and iron do not exist in the immediate vicinity of the Baltic, these new ventures were dependent upon foreign iron and coal for their sustenance, and have never been other than weaklings since their birth. The government is now tired of continually altering the tariff, and giving subsidies to these undertakings; and the attitude of neutrality it has taken up has had the effect of placing most of them more or less on the verge of ruin: hence the delegates representing them have been vehement in their demands for support; and, the support they want being precisely the opposite of that which would revive the Ural iron trade, the battle between the 'independent works' (i.e., using only Russian iron and fuel, as in the Urals) and the 'dependent works,' which cannot exist without foreign iron and coal, has been a tough one, accompanied by scenes of personal and undignified wrangling. It is hardly possible for the government to support one without injuring the other; and, as both are equally rotten, it is angrily disposed towards each of the industrial parties. Probably no branch of Russian trade has 'milked' the financial resources of the government more than the iron trade; and prosperity

and progress have attended so few of its efforts, that the government is almost tired of dispensing its support.

LONGEVITY.

It has been stated, with some degree of reason, says the *Lancet*, that the maximum age attainable by man has risen somewhat during the present century over that recorded in former ages. In judging of such statement, some allowance for error must be made. The exact statistical calculations of our day should not, in fairness, be marshalled against the round numbers of less accurate traditions. The fact remains, nevertheless, that the limit of seventy years is now very frequently passed. Fourscore may even be reached by some without excessive labor and sorrow, and we have among us nonagenarians who carry on with still respectable proficiency the activities of their prime. Such effective longevity is a bright spot in the history of our advancing civilization. Its comparative frequency, and its association with different physical types, suggest a certain generality in its origin, and encourage the hope that it may be, in some measure at least, dependent on personal conduct. It has been stated that no such condition can influence the length of life after middle age. After that period, inherited vital force is the only potential factor. To some extent this may be granted. If we fix an average of conduct, and suppose that a number of persons conform to it, we should certainly find the purest and most powerful constitutional types outlive the others. For instance: a gouty tendency does not enhance the prospects of old age. A rheumatic one is little better in this respect. The scrofulous are heavily weighted in the race of life by the chances of several infirmities. Nervous persons, again, are wiry, and may live through much trouble in virtue of their elastic tenacity. Then there are nondescript diatheses, which, except in their remote history, present no definite physical bias. Theoretically, these are most likely to furnish, under ordinary usages, the old men of a given time.

It will be at once evident, however, that these are general statements, and that an unlikely individual will often exceed his own expectation of life, and by care, or from the suitability of his circumstances, will reach old age. In weighing the value of constitutional tendencies, moreover, another nearly related quality should be considered. This is disposition. The mind of a man must be more or less of the nature of his body, and accordingly we expect to find, and do find, that mental habit reflects in preferences, varia-